

Kern County Sheriff's Office Off-Highway Vehicle Enforcement Team

Pacific Crest Trail

OHV Trespass Investigation and Hiker Survey Report



PCT History

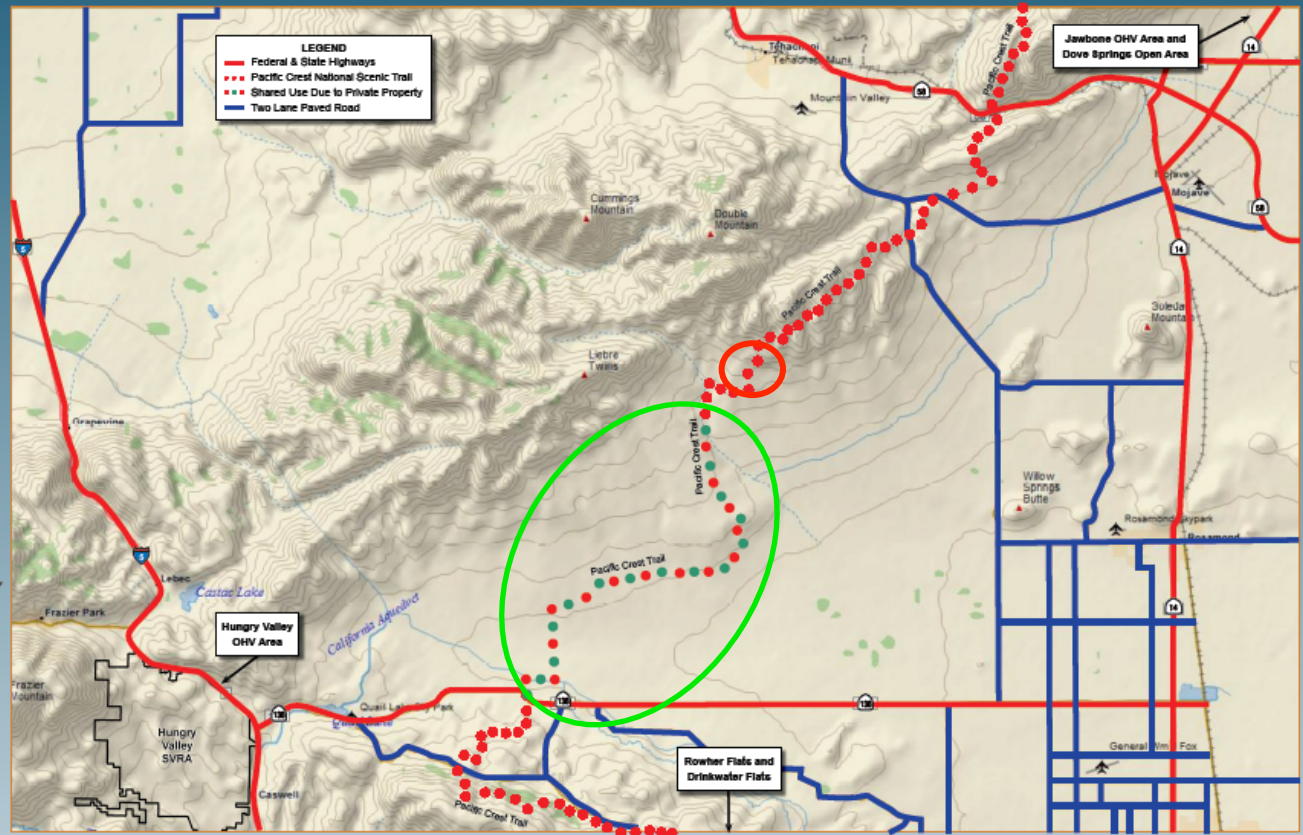
- The Pacific Crest Trail, or PCT as it is commonly referred to, is 2,663 miles long and spans from Mexico to Canada.
- The PCT was designated by the United States Federal Government as a National Scenic Trail in 1968, exclusively for hikers and equestrians, through the enactment of the National Trails System Act.
- Approximately 150 miles of the PCT traverses Kern County.



PCT Tour



Pacific Crest Trail Map



RESPONSIBLE OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE RECREATION

Background - Allegations

- During May of 2014, The Kern County Sheriff's Office Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Team deployed to address allegations of widespread illegal OHV use. The allegations were made by members of a specific local community group, in a letter which was written to the Kern County Parks Department in April of 2014.

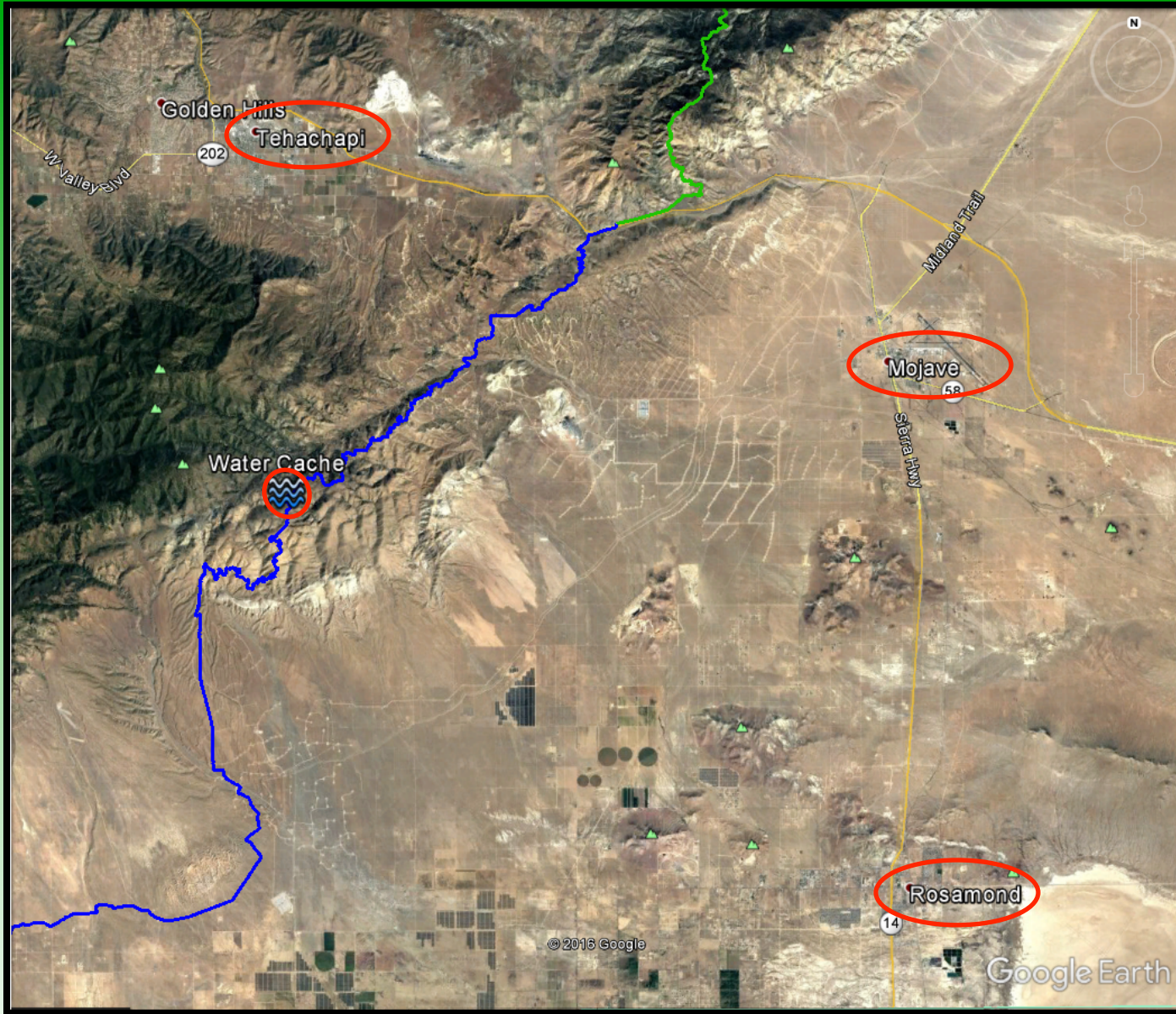
"During the last 16 months, the Pacific Crest Trail and BLM parcels in Kern County have suffered more damage from illegal OHV use than we have witnessed in the past 6 years. Rural residents have been burdened with increased trespass onto private property. Illegal camping at the base of the Tehachapi Mountains in Rosamond and on the Aqueduct has increased, and these have become popular staging areas where dirt bikers meet to ride illegally and unimpeded onto the PCT, and private lands."



Background - Allegations

- The area receiving the majority of complaints was east of Oak Creek Canyon in Tehachapi, between approximately mile 531 and mile 534 of the Pacific Crest Trail.
- Prominent members of this group alleged off-highway vehicle trespass on the Pacific Crest Trail was like a “freeway,” and was causing widespread “destruction” of the trail.





Background - Allegations

- Based on these allegations, a general perception grew that this was an out of control situation, with widespread destruction occurring.
- The issue gained momentum quickly, causing ranking officials from multiple agencies to take notice, likely the influencing future public policies and management practices of agencies such as the USFS.
- This was the case, despite the fact the allegations had not yet been thoroughly vetted.



Investigative Strategy

- Due to the extensive allegations, we felt a thorough investigation was needed to assess the issue and develop a strategy to address it.
 - Checked historical records within the Sheriff's office.
 - Spoke with stakeholders on both sides of the issue.
 - Spoke with our partners in allied agencies such as OHMVR, USFS, and BLM.
 - Interviewed PCT hikers.
 - Deployed to the location where the problem was reportedly occurring.
 - Looked for physical evidence to corroborate the allegations.



Preliminary Investigation

- Conducted a check of Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) related calls for service between October 2013 and May 2014. None were received.
- Conducted a check of calls for service in the Rosamond, Tehachapi (including Oak Creek Canyon), and Mojave areas involving OHVs, for the same time frame.
- Only five (5) calls for service were received; four (4) of those five (5) calls for service were determined to be non-criminal in nature.



Preliminary Investigation

- During May of 2014, deputies began on-the-ground directed patrols in this region on well over 100 miles of trails.
- During these patrols, over 40 PCT hikers were contacted and interviewed about OHV use on the PCT.
- Only one said they had seen a motorcycle on the PCT. That incident occurred over 100 miles south of Kern County.



Preliminary Investigation

- Deputies spoke to several PCT hikers who commented, “It [motorcycles trespassing on the PCT] doesn’t seem to me to be a problem.”
- Another hiker said he previously heard a woman stating that there have been a lot of problems with motorcycles riding on the PCT in the Tehachapi area. The hiker told deputies, “It’s probably fabricated or something. It doesn’t make sense.”



Interview of PCT Hiker - May 24, 2014

“It’s probably fabricated or something. It doesn’t make sense.”



Preliminary Investigation

- Deputies spoke to a local resident, “Daniel”, who was restocking a water cache along the PCT, above Oak Creek Canyon, and visiting with several hikers who were resting there.
- While discussing the issue of motorcycles on the PCT, Daniel stated, “Well it’s certainly been better in the last few years. You know, ten years ago it was horrible.”



Interview of PCT Hikers and "Daniel" - May 24, 2014



Preliminary Investigation

- During the investigation, deputies found some evidence that motorcycles had been on the PCT, but only in a very limited area; approximately one mile in length.
- Deputies contacted 18 motorcyclists during these patrols, on trails which were more than a mile from the PCT.
- 12 of the riders were either owners of property in the immediate area, or guests.
- Each group said they were aware of the prohibition of riding on the PCT, and they were familiar with its location.



Example of Evidence of Motorcycles



Preliminary Investigation Findings

- As a result of our initial investigation, the Sheriff's Office determined the following to be worthwhile means for addressing future concerns:
 - Continued collaboration with the USFS to better sign the section of the PCT where occasional trespass appeared to occur.
 - Organizing community meetings with the "Citizen Stakeholder" groups.
 - On-the-ground patrols of this section of PCT several times a year.



Final Investigation

- In the fall of 2014, the Sheriff's Office OHV Team began hosting meetings with law enforcement representatives from the USFS, BLM, and the OHMVR Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation.
- The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the history of motorized trespass on the Pacific Crest Trail, determine the extent of the problem, and share ideas about how to address it.



Final Investigation

- Each of the allied agencies expressed that they had devoted a considerable amount of time and resources into independently investigating this community groups allegations, and found the allegations of motorized trespass to be exaggerated.
- The Kern County Sheriff's Office Air Support Unit and OHV Team conducted joint patrols, with the previously mentioned agencies, on the Pacific Crest Trail from late October of 2014 through January of 2015.



Joint Deployment



Final Investigation

- In addition to combined patrols with on-the-ground units and the Kern County Sheriff's Office Air Support Unit, concealed trail cameras and GPS trackable bait items were used to monitor the Pacific Crest Trail in the area where trespass was reported most frequently.
 - The trail cameras recorded two incidents of illegal motor vehicle operation on the Pacific Crest Trail.
 - The GPS trackable bait was never taken.



Foot Patrol on the PCT



Use of Bait items and Game Cameras



Final Investigation

- Deputies expanded the search area, and patrolled the majority of the Pacific Crest Trail as it passes through Kern County to ensure we were not missing anything.
- The only area with any evidence whatsoever that motorcycles had been on the Pacific Crest Trail, other than the limited area east of Oak Creek Canyon, was the desert section east of Kelso Valley Road.
- Based on the evidence observed, the motorized trespass in this segment appears to be even less frequent than what occurs in the area east of Oak Creek Canyon.



Directed Patrols on the PCT



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Directed Patrols on the PCT



Final Investigation

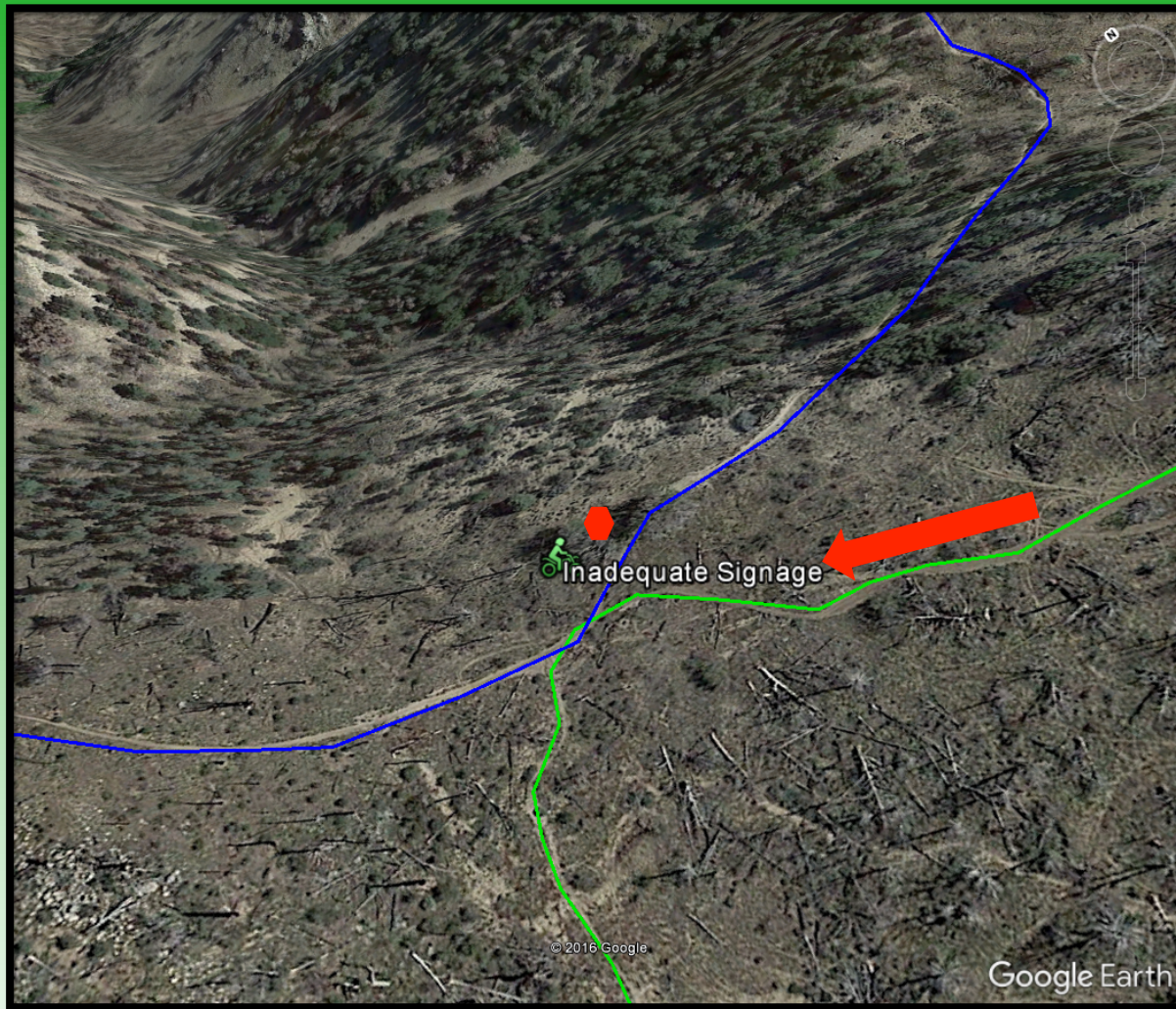
- During the thirteen Kern County Sheriff's Office OHV Team deployments on the Pacific Crest Trail for the 2014/2015 fall and winter seasons, deputies found motorcycles on the trail on one occasion, in the area east of Oak Creek Canyon.
- The operators of the two motorcycles were detained and the incident was immediately investigated.
- The subsequent investigation conclusively determined the trespass to be unintentional, due to inadequate trail signage in the area where they entered the trail.



Area where riders were found on the PCT



Area where riders entered the PCT



Final Investigation

- The Kern County Sheriff's Office is aware of two incidents where a prominent member of The Group, provided inaccurate information to law enforcement relating to reports of motorcycles illegally trespassing on the Pacific Crest Trail.
- The first report was made to the OHMVR Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation in August of 2011.



Final Investigation

- In that case, the reporting party provided photos of four riders on motorcycles who were allegedly on the Pacific Crest Trail when the photo was taken.
- After a thorough investigation, the actual site the photo was taken was located. Law enforcement personnel determined the trail the riders were on was not the Pacific Crest Trail, but instead a trail on un-posted private property where the riders were legally allowed to be.



Photo of riders allegedly on the PCT



Photo taken by law enforcement confirming the trail was not the PCT

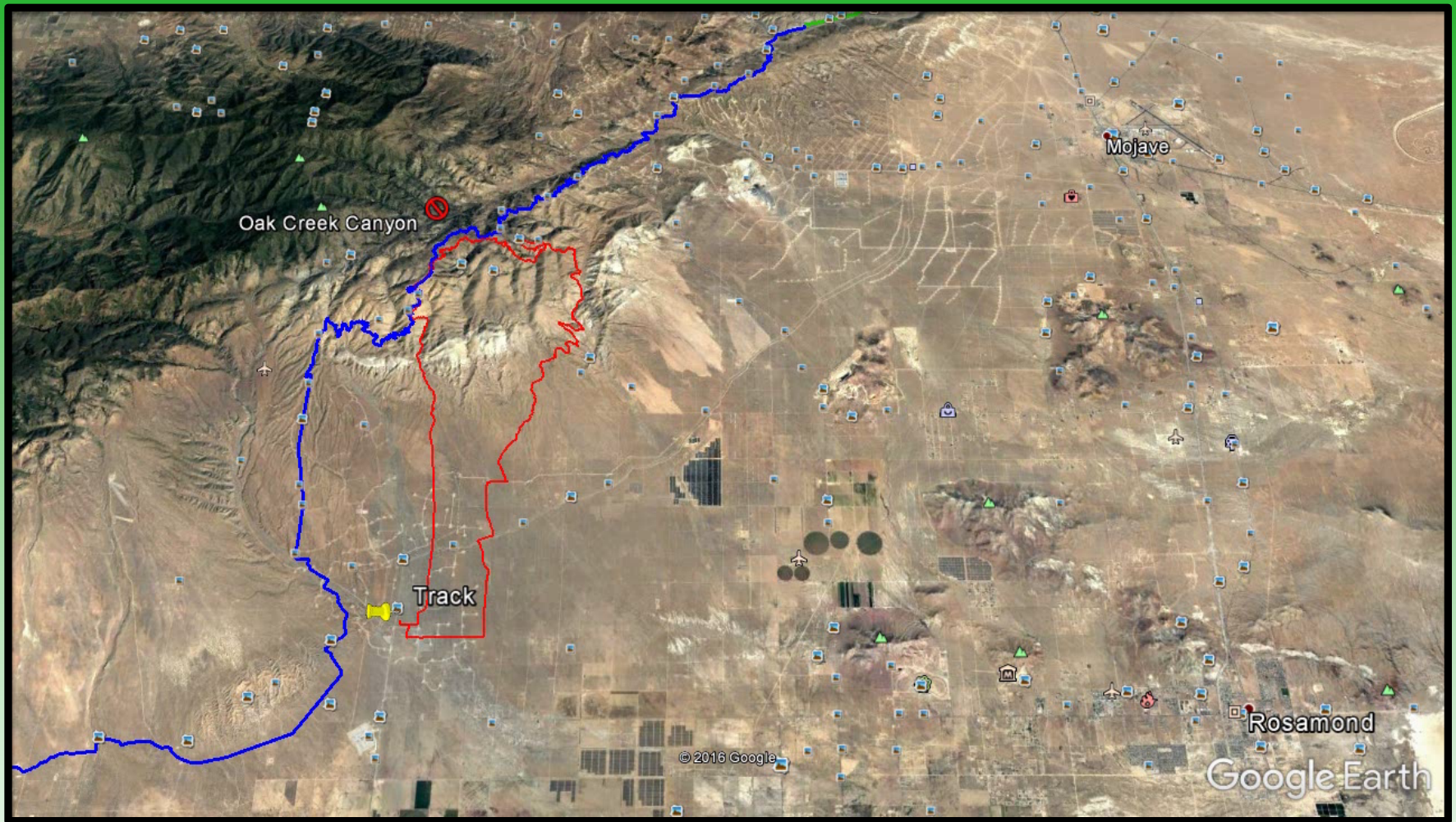


Final Investigation

- The second incident occurred in January of 2015, and involved a report to the Kern County Sheriff's Office of two men on motorcycles, who the reporting party said were trespassing on the Pacific Crest Trail.
- During the investigation, one of the riders provided a date/time stamped GPS track to law enforcement, which showed the route they traveled on the date in question.
- The GPS data conclusively showed the riders were not on the Pacific Crest Trail, as had been alleged.



GPS Track Disproving Allegations



PCT Survey

- The Kern County Sheriff's Office hosted several meetings with law enforcement representatives from the USFS, BLM, and the OHMVR division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation during the summer and fall of 2015.
- The purpose of the meetings was, in part, to discuss discrepancies between the observations of deputies and law enforcement officers from the aforementioned agencies and ongoing reports of motorized trespass on the Pacific Crest Trail by members of the community group and their associates.



PCT Survey

- It was collectively decided amongst law enforcement that a survey of Pacific Crest Trail hikers during the spring of 2016 would be the best way to assess the frequency of illegal motorized trespass, and the impact of legal off-highway vehicle use on the Pacific Crest Trail hiking experience.
- Ultimately, the intent of the survey was to obtain unbiased, reliable information.



PCT Survey

- The USFS's most recent published numbers show 1,468 permits were issued in 2014 for "thru-hikers" on the Pacific Crest Trail.
- The greatest number of PCT hikers typically travel through Kern County during the last week of April through the middle of June.
- Being thru-hikers, we believed the respondents to the survey would likely have no ties to Kern County, and were equally unlikely to be a member or associate of any local special interest group.



PCT Survey

- A location was identified along the Pacific Crest Trail to set up two survey boxes, which would be away from the roadway, near the northern end of the Piute Mountains in the Sequoia National Forest.
- The remote location and unmanned survey method provided unfettered access to Pacific Crest Trail hikers throughout the week, day and night, while ensuring the survey would not be adulterated by outside influences.



PCT Survey

- Additionally, the location of the survey boxes ensured the hikers had already traveled through the area of Kern County receiving the bulk of the complaints.
- Ultimately, we received 490 responses to the survey, ensuring a large enough sampling (approximately 33%) of thru-hikers to provide adequate data to reach an irrefutable conclusion.



PCT Survey Box



PCT Survey

- Two survey boxes were placed on a post along the Pacific Crest Trail.
 - One survey box contained blank survey cards, each with questions eliciting either yes/no or scaled responses from 1-10.
 - The second box was secured in the closed position by a keyed lock, with an open slot in the top of the box and a label directing respondents to place completed survey cards inside. This ensured the surveys would remain uncorrupted by responses from other hikers.



PCT Survey Box



PCT Survey Card - Front



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Off-Road Vehicle Enforcement Team

PCT Questionnaire

1. Please rate your PCT hiking experience while in Kern County on a scale from 1 to 10.
(1 – poor, 10 – excellent) _____
2. Did you have any direct contact with persons operating ATVs or motorcycles near the PCT while you were hiking in Kern County? **Yes / No**
 - a. Please rate that experience from 1 to 10.
(1 – poor, 10 – excellent) _____
3. Did you have any indirect contact with persons operating ATVs or motorcycles (i.e. see or hear) near the PCT while you were in Kern County? **Yes / No**
4. Did either of those experiences detract from your enjoyment of the PCT?
Yes / No
5. Did you encounter anyone operating a motorcycle or ATV on the PCT in Kern County?
Yes / No
6. Several roads are dual use sections of the PCT in Kern County. Was that where you encountered the vehicles asked about in question 5? **Yes / No**

Name: _____

Trail Name: _____

Place of Residence (City, State, Country): _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Deputy/Ranger Name: _____ ID #: _____ Agency: _____

(661) 861-3110



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PCT Survey Card - Back

1. Additional Comments:

PCT Survey Results

■ Question #1:

- Please rate your PCT hiking experience while in Kern County on a scale from 1 to 10.

(1 – poor, 10 – excellent)

- 445 – Rated their experience between 7 and 10.
- 26 – Rated their experience between 5 and 7.
- 12 – No response provided.
- 7 – Rated their experience under 5.



PCT Survey Results

■ Question #2:

- Did you have any **direct contact** with persons operating ATVs or motorcycles **near the PCT** while you were hiking in Kern County? **Yes / No**
- 411 – Had no direct contact with motorcycles or ATVs.
- 77 – Had direct contact with motorcycles or ATVs.
- 2 – No response provided.



PCT Survey Results

■ Question #2a:

— Please rate that experience from 1 to 10.
(1 – poor, 10 – excellent)

- 337 – No response provided.
- 146 – Rated that contact at a 5 or above.
- 7 – Rated that contact below a 5.



PCT Survey Results

■ Question #3:

- Did you have any ***indirect contact*** with persons operating ATVs or motorcycles (i.e. see or hear) ***near the PCT*** while you were in Kern County? **Yes / No**
- 361 – Had no indirect contact with motorcycles or ATVs.
- 127 – Had indirect contact.
- 2 – No response provided.



PCT Survey Results

■ Question #4:

— Did either of those experiences detract from your enjoyment of the PCT? **Yes / No**

- 327 (89%) – Said it did not detract from their experience.
- 40 (11%) – Said it detracted from their experience.
 - Two of these respondents said they neither saw nor heard any motorcycles or ATVs, indicating they may not have understood the question.



PCT Survey Results

- Two of these respondents commented in the notes section and expressed gratitude to motorcyclists for their kindness and courteousness.
- One of these incidents occurred in Los Angeles County.
- 123 – No response provided.
- 107 of these **had no contact** whatsoever with motorcycles or ATVs.



PCT Survey Results

■ Question #5:

- Did you encounter anyone operating a motorcycle or ATV **on the PCT** in Kern County? **Yes / No**
 - 434 (88%) – Did not see any motorcycles or ATVs on the PCT in Kern County.
 - 48 (10%) – Saw motorcycles or ATVs on the PCT in Kern County.
 - 40 of these were on dual-use sections of the PCT where it was **legal** for them to ride.
 - 8 (2%) – No response provided.



PCT Survey Results

■ Question #6:

- Several roads are dual use sections of the PCT in Kern County. Was that where you encountered the vehicles asked about in question 5? **Yes / No**
- 8 (2%) – Saw motorcycles or ATVs on the PCT which was ***not in a dual use area.***



PCT Survey Results

■ Additional Comments

- 81 – Unrelated to motorcycles or ATVs.
- 9 – Mixed or ambiguous comments regarding motorcycles or ATVs.
- 8 – Comments favorable to motorcycles or ATVs.
- 5 – Comments unfavorable to motorcycles or ATVs.
- The combined comments regarding off-highway vehicles totaled just over 21% of the entire responses, even though the survey was specifically about that.



Findings and Conclusion

- Although some evidence exists to demonstrate motorized trespass does occur on the Pacific Crest Trail in Kern County, it is clearly confined to a small area.
- It is also clear that the vast majority of Pacific Crest Trail hikers and off-highway vehicle recreationists coexist harmoniously and peacefully.



Findings and Conclusion

- During the many in-person contacts with Pacific Crest Trail hikers, it was far more common for deputies to hear them express wonder and amazement at seeing motorcycles traversing a trail on a nearby hill than it was to hear expressions of dissatisfaction with having to share the environment with them.
- In many cases, the hikers expressed gratitude toward the off-highway vehicle recreationists for their offers of food and water. The survey responses from the legitimate users of the Pacific Crest Trail, the hikers, also support this observation.



Findings and Conclusion

- The evidence is clear that motorized trespass on the Pacific Crest Trail in Kern County is negligible, particularly in comparison to that which has been alleged by prominent members of this specific community group.
- Nonetheless, ongoing patrols of the Pacific Crest Trail during key times, such as after rains, are recommended as a means of ensuring the successes of past efforts by community stakeholders and law enforcement are not undone.



Findings and Conclusion

- On the ground patrols have proven to be the most effective method of addressing off-highway vehicle trespasses, but are of extremely limited benefit when done on foot.
- Joint agency patrols, using motorcycles to patrol the trail itself, are recommended as the most efficient and effective way to locate and apprehend violators, and also provide a deterrent to others. Even members of the community group agreed with this.
- This, however, will require that the USFS provide a written exemption to law enforcement for that purpose.





Questions??

